THE HUN IN THE WORLD OF ART

His Destructive Fury the Outstanding Phenomenon in the War—Its Origin in Traits of Peace

By Royal Cortissoz

IT IS, perhaps, legitimate to begin these remarks with a reminiscence. In the summer of 1906 I revisited Germany for the express purpose of making a survey of the modern art of the country. When I had been there before I had spent most of my time in the historical museums, studying the old masters. The past had altogether absorbed me. It was pleasanter to foregather with Dürer in Nuremberg than to hunt up new "movements." And, besides, the new movements were then scarcely getting themselves invented. On this later occasion they were in full swing. Having taken pains to find out in advance when the great exhibitions would be open, I resolved that I would see every one of them, explore the larger cities, pay careful attention to buildings and public monuments, and, in a word, identify the leading characteristics of contemporary German painting, sculpture and architecture. I did this, incidentally acquiring a good many impressions of German taste and manners generally. If I refer to the experience now it is because it has helped me to understand the German in the war.

Royal Cortissoz

From my journal I take these first notes, written in Berlin, not long after landing:

> A queer place, Germany. It so struck me the moment I saw the shores of the Weser. The landscape is flat and tame. Red roofs and windmills give a hint of picturesqueness to the very green meadows and woods, but there is nothing of the romance of the South, and I felt nothing of the gentle, sweet charm that belongs to the similarly simple landscape of England. Something vaguely impressed me in these first glimpses, something that smug, tidy Bremen made clearer, and that Berlin has finally explained to the full. It is all expressed in the old phrase, "Made in Germany." We know how skilful they are in making a solid, durable, tasteless and *cheap* article of commerce. I see now that they take the same material—which I figure as a kind of cement or powder, a preparation of some kind—and make everything in the world out of it. They use it in their buildings and in their flower beds, they paint their pictures with it and they put it in the soup; it comes out in their monuments and in their manners, for what they have left of this disgusting composition they use in the manufacture of Germans.
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> One likes the comfortable pavements, made by some cheap process, until all of a sudden you feel that you would give anything for a New York flagstone, cracked in six places, but, at any rate, human, or some Italian cobbles—anything that would break the appalling monotony, as of a city and a civilization made to order. Everything is so hopelessly new. It's splendid, in a way, to see everything so well made, everybody so well disciplined, but you get to hunger for atmosphere and for the sense of beauty. I feel that the Germans have immense strength, that they know what they are about, that they are thorough. I do not feel that there is an atom of artistic instinct in their blood. They come out pretty well in big official buildings; that is, in sheer bigness. But, then, as in the huge Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial here, they will set colossal bronze groups on shiny red granite, so that you want to weep for the horror of it.

I wrote that at the end of a week or ten days in Germany. And steadily thereafter, for weeks and weeks, my journal received similar observations, only deepening in feeling as the "inquest" went on. In Dresden, even in Dresden, which has some charming aspects, I find myself saying: "That idea of everything being made out of some cheap composition keeps growing in intensity in my head. What a world!"

Degradation of Taste and Morals

If it had only been an idea of cheap manufacture I would still have been puzzled when the Hun broke loose in August, 1914. But this was the mildest of the evils which seemed to me to be afflicting Germany in the summer of 1906. What soon was apparent, and became more and more obvious as accompanying the current degradation of taste, was a deadlier degradation of morals. This stared you in the face in every exhibition, it was rampant in the theatres, it was held up to view in all the bookshops, and by and by I came to feel it in the gross, overfed faces of the people about me. The "nudes," as we call them in our exhibitions, were not "nudes" in the exhibitions of Munich or Berlin—they were naked indecencies. I remember one popular picture in the Berlin "Secession," immensely popular if one could judge from the attention it received. It represented a lumpy Bacchante in the forest, luring a mob of men to her feet. The leering, bestial men were simply portraits of so many German types. Classical in motif, there was nothing in the least classical about the picture. It was pure pornography. Ir. that it was absolutely characteristic. The illustrated periodicals I overhauled were full of stuff in the same vein. The subject was always of the earth earthy, and, what was worse, the dirtier elements in the German artist's thoughts and emotions had somehow got into the very grain of his style. Those elements, too, were merely dirty, merely offensive, like a bad smell.

There is nothing witty, nothing brilliant, about the German decadent, as there is, for example, about a master like the Belgian, Felicien Rops. The German decadent is simply a grovelling beast. In Paris, along the Rue de Rivoli, the bookshops flaunt their *risqué* little pictures for the edification, chiefly, of the visiting tourist. These pictures are naughty, but at least cleverly done; they are touched with French wit and grace. The same things in a German bookshop, stuck even more aggressively under the nose of the passerby, are unqualifiedly revolting. I can imagine the pious wrath of a German professor, say one of the signers of the famous manifesto on the war, if he were confronted by these base postcards as a sign of his nation's spiritual downfall. But they have a certain validity as documents in the case. They are trifles, if you like, but they are of a piece with the great mass of what I saw in modern German art twelve years ago. They expressed what the painters, sculptors and architects were expressing: a vulgarity of soul so profound as to be symptomatic of nothing more nor less than moral rottenness.

I left for Vienna and Italy with a feeling as of having escaped from contact with some loathsome disease. I felt that the soul of the country was sick, if not dead. Rude bodily vigor was still there, a perfect torrent of physical energy, but of the humanities not a trace. Matthew Arnold used to laugh over the German deification of Goethe. Having created the greatest standing army in the world, he said, the Germans were bound to have a world poet to match. So I found it in the realm of art. They were doing everything on a huge scale, making huge pictures and monuments, producing them in great numbers, plunging furiously into the new movements aforesaid, and altogether endeavoring to prove that art, too, could be "Made in Germany." And this art, as it seemed to me, was filthy at the core. That is why, I repeat, I have been able to understand what the German has done since he swept across Belgium and Northern France. He entered those regions like a burglar and he has behaved in them like a Dead Sea ape. In the light of what I saw in 1906 I do not see how he could have done anything else. The impulse was even then in his blood, an instinct of race.

The Defilement Of Fine Things

There you have the true origin of the German atrocities, and I speak now of those committed upon the insensate bodies of works of art. It is breeding that tells, here as in every other walk of life. The best anecdote I know of the hundreds that have been recited about German character, as illustrated in the war, is the one embodying the remark of an officer rescued from drowning by the British, who had sent his ship to the bottom. "Well," he said, "I suppose it is true that you English will always be fools and that we Germans will never be gentlemen." The whole story of German destructiveness in the territories they have overrun is a story of bounders run amuck. It began with the senseless burning of Louvain. It went on with the violation of Rheims. It continued with the ruination of the historic ruins of Coucy, and so it will go on to the end—the defilement of fine things by people who cannot comprehend their nature. There have been from time to time vague stories about the benevolent intentions of the German government toward works of art. We have been told of commissions appointed by the All-Highest for the "safeguarding" of these treasures. Considering that the Kaiser's own sons have been listed high among the looters, it is not difficult to surmise what the imperial "safeguarding" will amount to. Early in the war—in fact, in the winter of 1914—it was rumored in the press that the "Adam" and "Eve" of Jan Van Eyck had been removed from the museum at Brussels and taken to Berlin, under the supervision of Dr. Bode. That distinguished functionary was quoted at the time as disclaiming the idea that works of art should be taken from a country by its conquerors! Various nominally reassuring remarks, of German origin, have occasionally wandered into print. But of what earthly value are they? You cannot take the word of a German until it is confirmed by a man of honor.

It is for this reason, and because the actual doings behind the German lines are hidden from us, that it is quite impossible to sketch even the roughest outline of what, precisely, the Hun has done in the world of art since he set out to wreck it. We can estimate the extent of some of the wreckage. We know little definite as yet about the thefts. At the same time we can congratulate ourselves upon certain incidents of salvaging. Allusion was made just now to the Van Eycks taken to Berlin. It is a comfort to know that the four central panels of the great altar piece of St. Bavon's at Ghent were removed to a secret place of safety weeks before the Germans could get near them. Every one who cares for the masters has some pet plan for German restitution after the war. My own special hope is that Berlin will not only be compelled to return the "Adam" and "Eve," but may also have to pay over to Belgium, as part of the indemnity, the Van Eyck panels long preserved in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum. To assemble in the cathedral at Ghent once more all the scattered parts of the renowned polyptych of "The Adoration of the Lamb" would be a peculiar solace to the burghers of the town. Connoisseurs throughout the world would hail it as a work of fitting reconstruction. And to compel Germany to bear a part in it would be a piquant form of justice.

The panels at St. Bavon's were not the sole gems rescued. Many paintings and other works of art were salvaged from the churches and the Cardinal's palace at Malines during the bombardment of the town. Throughout Belgium, indeed, efforts were made to save public and private belongings of an artistic nature in advance of invasion, and though detailed reports have not been issued it is believed that considerable precious property was thus made secure. In France, too, many masterpieces were hurried into safety just in time to avoid capture or destruction. At Lille they saved from the Musée Wicar that famous wax bust, long attributed to Raphael, of which Stanford White once wrote: "When you go and look at it you wish you may die or something." The French government has of course been active from the start in the rescue and protection of works of art. It has done much, we know. Some day the full report will be made. In the meantime we may take courage. We say this with reference, chiefly, to movables. Many pictures now hidden away in Germany will doubtless be restored when the peace terms are settled. The pastels of La Tour will in the fulness of time be returned to St. Quentin, along with numerous other achievements of eighteenth century genius reft from that town by the Hun. But the damage to architecture is beyond repair.

Louvain can never look the same again. Rheims as it once was has gone forever. German "success" was there complete. Possibly, before this summer's fighting is over. Amiens will have met the same fate. I might add to the list, citing Ypres and divers other salient towns. The list of dead and mutilated monuments of world-wide fame is tragically long. But there is another phase of the matter that is equally horrible to contemplate, and, in its more intimately human character, even more momentous. I refer to the blasting of the whole physiognomy of immense tracts of French and Belgian land. We cannot but think of these atrocities in terms of individual buildings. It is the cathedral at Rheims. It is the old Cloth Hall at Ypres. But what of the innumerable nameless dwellings, in city and country, which counted, on the whole, quite as much as any single monument in making France and Belgium beautiful? What of their ancient walls, their softly glowing tiles or their dully gleaming slates, their carvings, their mouldings, their doorways, and all their innumerable souvenirs of the past? The Kaiser has done more than destroy a given number of monumental buildings. He has defaced a whole world. It can be rebuilt. Parts of it are being rebuilt even now. But in the rebuilding it must inevitably suffer a complete transformation. In French periodicals some of the designs for the rehabilitation of the ravaged provinces have been published. They have included a number of plausible schemes. But French architects, as well as French painters and sculptors, have been falling in their hundreds on the battlefield. Their profession is not as strong as it used to be, and, indeed, in country architecture the modern French school has never been very well inspired.

My friend the Abbé Dimnet wrote a long piece in the London "Saturday Review" about these new plans when a batch of them was first exhibited in Paris. He saw models there as well as drawings. He was friendly in his comments, of course, and duly patriotic, but being a man of critical judgment he was not markedly enthusiastic. I read that article of his with misgivings which published drawings that now and then have come into view have hardly assuaged. It seems practically impossible that the stricken lands, after the war, should wear anything like the charm they possessed before it. French scholarship and taste will count prodigiously in the restoration of historic monuments. They will have a much slighter influence in the solution of humbler problems. Moreover, it is doubtful if all the talent in France could quite revive, in the treatment of those problems, the magic that time alone can work. Farmhouses may be made most ingeniously picturesque, shops and dwellings in the smaller towns may be framed with the utmost discretion, cottages in the suburbs may be built with the faithfulest emulation of the past—and still these edifices will be seen to have somehow broken with the old tradition. How could it be otherwise? It is a loss which we must face. And, furthermore, there is another side to this subject on which it is highly desirable to dwell.

Legendary Habits Are Passing

The old farmhouse is gone. While we mourn its passing, let us reflect that there goes with it some of the most flagrantly insanitary conditions known in the annals of rusticity. We are being told all the time of the pathetic tenacity with which the French peasant clings to his immemorial customs. He must sleep with as little fresh air as possible. The barnyard must be close at hand. He is no glutton for plumbing. But in the new order of things that is coming many an ancient custom will have to go by the board, if for no other reason than that the government will have to take a hand in the rebuilding, on a large scale, and it will not find it convenient to consult all the legendary habits of every parish. Precedent will play its part, but it will be a latter-day precedent, that established by the men who have dealt with big housing problems in England and the United States. Mediævalism will go out and modernity will come in. In town and country drastic changes will be accepted as a matter of course when peace is declared and refugee communities return to reërect their old homes. New ideas of house planning will prevail.

The foreign motorist is, of course, enchanted when he stops for a meal at some wayside farm and eats his omelet before a time-stained fireplace, with chickens running under the table and a bed shut in behind its ornate spindles in the corner. He photographs the room before he goes away, and by and by tells his friends all about it. But after the war it is not improbable that his omelet may be cooked on an electric or gas range, and all that he will know about his host's bedroom will be that it is somewhere "upstairs." There will be new systems of heating and water supply everywhere. Drainage will be revolutionized. Electricity will be more widely employed than ever before in the distribution of light and power, promoting greater convenience in industry and innumerable relations of life. Modes of transportation will be bettered. Good roads have always been common in France, but after the war it is conceivable that new uses will be made of them. The motor will increase in popularity as it is put on the French market in greater numbers and at a lower price. It is likely, too, to be of more service on the French farm than hitherto. The new era ought to be a tremendous era for the farm tractor. In short, the regions needing reconstruction from the ground up are in the nature of things destined to be modernized to an extraordinary extent, and it will be surprising if this does not exercise a decisive influence upon the country at large.

It is notoriously dangerous to prophesy. I would not go too far in my anticipations. The routine of centuries is imperious, and it would be absurd to expect these people to make themselves and their environment over in a night. But changes of the sort I have indicated would appear to be as certain as the tides, and it seems as certain that they should be accompanied by a pronounced moral effect. Is it, for example, too much to surmise that there may even be a more or less voluntary shelving of some old landmarks in the future of which I speak? I cannot imagine a Frenchman or a Belgian tearing down a fine old building simply to put an ugly one in its place. But I can easily see him substituting a practicable bridge, at the right point on the river, for the structure that was ages ago mistakenly placed, and I can see him in many a kindred way making his daily life a more agreeable affair. He won't be a Baron Haussmann. But here and there he will take a leaf from Baron Haussmann's book. The resultant panorama, for the motorist to whom I have just alluded, may not be so beguiling as in days of yore. On the other hand, for human beings living on the spot the provinces now rendered noisome and deadly by the Hun promise ultimately to be among the most healthful, most livable in Europe.

It is not the only solace we have. From the beginning German evil has had a curious way of defeating itself. It does incalculable damage, God knows, but in the long run it falls short of its foul purpose. The crimes of its armies have only served to raise up new hosts in the path of their triumph. The bombing of hospitals and the sinking of Red Cross ships, the murder of civilians, the torture of prisoners, the erection of treachery and falsehood into the cornerstones of a kind of Hohenzollern religion, over which the Kaiser presides with obscene mouthings—all this has profited the Hun nothing in the task he set himself: to break the soul of decent mankind. The killing of men, women and children, the reduction of material destruction to a science, have landed him, after all, in tragic futility. Witness, as one bit of evidence, his harmlessness on the spiritual side of the world of art. German frightfulness was to stop the clock—but the clock has gone on striking the fruitful hours.

Almost the first thing the war did in the realm of artistic things was to bring the righteous passion of Louis Raemaekers to the fore. If ever a criminal has had his Nemesis in history the Kaiser has found his in this Dutch cartoonist. People ask sometimes if the war is going to produce anything remarkable in art. It has done so already, in Raemaekers. Nothing like his vitriolic drawings has ever hitherto been produced by any war. Beside his withering portraits of the Kaiser, the Crown Prince, Hindenburg and the rest the savageries of Gillray and Rowlandson in the Napoleonic period seem but the crude exaggerations of amateurs. It is interesting to note, however, that Raemaekers, the one great gift that has come to us in this time, is a master of ideas, not of style. His draftsmanship, though entirely adequate, is not by itself an object to excite unmeasured admiration. Forain, a veteran in the pictorial satire of Europe, still remains king of them all. In respect to style, indeed, the war has produced no new figure. I cannot, for the life of me, see why it should be expected to do so. The wind bloweth where it listeth. Genius appears regardless of cataclysms. Shelley and Byron, Wordsworth and Coleridge, all drew fertilizing thoughts from the French Revolution; but it would be nonsensical to attribute to that upheaval the elements of genius by virtue of which they live to-day.

An Affirmation And a Protest

French art, then, has yielded no portents since the war began. But the important point is that neither has it been put to death by frightfulness. When some one asked Sieyès what he had done during the Terror he replied, simply, "I lived." It is a proud enough boast for French art now to make. Thousands of her youngest and most precious sons have perished in the conflict, but she still maintains her steadfast carriage. This year the Salon has been opened once more in Paris, the first Salon since the war, and, as M. Henri Lavédan says in "L'Illustration," it is unique because it is, in effect, more than a manifestation of art; it is a manifestation of *esprit*, of character, a national act. "This Salon," he says, "is at once an affirmation and a protest. It is an affirmation of life, of health, of confidence and hope. It is a protest against the villany of an enemy, who, piling up all manner of crimes, has found joy in the destruction and defilement of beauty." These observations accompany a voluminous sheaf of pictures and sculptures. It includes no masterpieces, and, as I have indicated above, nothing new, nothing arrestingly original. Its real significance goes deeper. What the Salon testifies to is, as M. Lavédan says, the national fidelity to ideals of art. Better, perhaps, by far, than the apparition of any single type of genius just now, is this disclosure of the magnificent vitality of the French soul. Against that source of eternal inspiration the Hun has been as powerless as the ravings of a drunken pork butcher against the disdainful stars.

In a thousand ways the genius of the country has gone on upon its functions, untouched by the German terror. The "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," that most edifying and most

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MURDER—By Franz Stuck

It is, appropriately, to a German artist that we owe this perfect interpretation of the German spirit—ruthless in crime and rushing headlong upon the Furies that await the criminal.

The Wax Bust at Lille

An Italian masterpiece, long attributed to Raphael, which belongs to the Musée Wicar at Lille. It was rescued by the French authorities and placed in safety on the eve of the German invasion of the city, a happy instance of the escape of Beauty from the Beast.

THE DEPARTURE FOR THE ISLAND OF LOVE—By Antoine Watteau

This famous picture, one of the glories of the Louvre, is here reproduced as consummately typifying in its gaillard grace, its delicate sentiment and its romantic charm the French genius which the Kaiser struggles in vain to desecrate

What "Kultur" Has Cost Allies—Gains Promised in Reconstruction—Triumph of Civilization